

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TAGS: ELAB PFOR VE ECON

SUBJ: LIKELIHOOD OF PETROLEUM UNION STRIKE REDUCED

REF: CARACAS 9302, CARACAS 0278

1. TWO EVENTS DURING THE LAST WEEK HAVE LESSENED THE CHANCES OF A STRIKE BY WORKERS IN THE NEWLY NATIONALIZED PETROLEUM INDUSTRY. FIRST

,
ON JAN 13 PRESIDENT PEREZ HELD A MARATHON SESSION WITH THE LEADERS OF THE PETROLEUM WORKERS FEDERATIONS (FEDEPETROL AND FETRA-HIDROCARBUROS) AND OF THE CONFEDERATION OF VENEZUELAN WORKERS (CTV). THE WHOLE PROBLEM OF IMMEDIATE PAYMENT TO THE WORKERS OF SENIORITY AND SEVERANCE BENEFITS WAS EXAMINED IN GREAT DETAIL. THE SESSION DID NOT FINALLY RESOLVE THE PROBLEM BUT IT DID UNDERLINE THE DIFFICULTIES LIKELY TO BE ENCOUNTERED IN BREAKING THOUSANDS OF TRUST AGREEMENTS BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL WORKERS AND PRIVATE BANKS TO ALLOW FOR THE IMMEDIATE PAYMENT OF BENEFITS AND ALSO PUBLICLY CALLED INTO QUESTION THE WISDOM OF BREAKING THE TRUSTS. IN GENERAL THE MEETING SEEMS TO HAVE HAD A CALMING EFFECT AND WAS A CONCRETE DEMONSTRATION OF THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GOV WITH THE WORKER'S PROBLEMS.

2. SECONDLY, ON JAN 14 CESAR GIL, ONE OF THE THREE REPRESENTATIVES OF MEP ON THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE CTV, ANNOUNCED HIS

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RESIGNATION FROM MEP. GIL HAS CLOSE TIES WITH FEDEPETROL AND

MANY MEP LEADERS IN THAT UNION ARE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW HIM OUT OF THE PARTY. GIL'S RESIGNATION WAS PROVOKED BY A MEP ATTEMPT TO DISCIPLINE HIM FOR DISOBEYING THE PARTY DIRECTIVE REGARDING PARTICIPATION IN THE OIL NATIONALIZATION CEREMONIES (CARACAS 13529). GIL INSISTS HE WAS ACTING AS A UNION LEADER, NOT A PARTY LEADER, AT THE CEREMONIES. GIL'S RESIGNATION HAS THROWN THE MEP LEADERSHIP OF FEDEPETROL, INCLUDING UNION PRESIDENT CARLOS PINERUA, INTO CONSIDERABLE DISARRAY AND WILL CERTAINLY DISRUPT PINERUA'S REELECTION CAMPAIGN WHICH HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE ANTI-GOV AND ANTI-AD AGITATION IN THE IL CAMPS.

3. GIL AND HIS FOLLOWERS, WHILE THEY WILL PROBABLY OFFICIALLY CALL THEMSELVES INDEPENDENTS, ARE NOW EXPECTED TO SUPPORT THE AD CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY AT THE FEDEPETROL CONGRESS IN EARLY FEB, PERHAPS GIVING AD AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN FEDEPETROL. GIL'S DEFECTION IS ANOTHER STEP IN THE CONTINUING DISINTEGRATION OF MEP AS AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL FORCE IN LABOR (CARACAS A-174).

4. COMMENT: DESPITE THE APPARENT EASING OF TENSIONS AMONG PETROLEUM WORKERS, THE UNDERLYING ISSUE OF WHAT SORT OF A RELATIONSHIP WILL PREVAIL BETWEEN LABOR AND MANAGEMENT IN THE NATIONALIZED PETROLEUM INDUSTRY REMAINS AND WILL TAKE MONTHS, IF NOT YEARS, TO RESOLVE WITH THE CONSTANT THREAT OF LABOR UNREST IF THE WORKERS FEEL OR ARE LED TO BELIEVE THAT THEIR RIGHTS ARE NOT BEING PROPERLY PROTECTED.
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